

Supervisor FRONTLINE

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A newsletter from the WA State Employee Assistance Program

Questions



I am a new manager and in my first job as a supervisor. What problems might I encounter early that I can prepare for now? If I feel overwhelmed, can the EAP help me?



I have an employee who could use EAP's help, but they are in a rural area of Washington. How can they receive assistance from the EAP?

Answers



Becoming a manager can be exciting and feel a little overwhelming. It helps to be sure you understand your role and responsibilities. Have this discussion and nail down the details early. This will prevent many problems you would otherwise face from overlooking important aspects of your job. Be prepared for difficult challenges that lead you to question your ability to do the job. This is normal. If your employees are performing well, do not see this as a signal to ignore them until they need you. Be proactive and engage with them regularly. The supervisory role includes influence projected by your knowledge and abilities, and leverage naturally linked to your authority. Both dynamics influence employee productivity. The EAP can help you with time and stress management; tips on organizing work; consulting on how to manage difficult employees and how to coach; education on conflict resolution and managing teams; support when faced with tough decisions like terminating an employee; and, counseling to help you avoid burnout. We also recommend supervisors/managers review the [Supervisor's Guide to the EAP](#) to learn how the EAP can be of service to them and their employees.



The EAP currently contracts with over 65 clinicians throughout Washington State and is continuing to seek out more providers to offer EAP services. (see [EAP Locations](#)). However, if an employee resides/works in an area that doesn't currently have a provider, the EAP can always schedule a phone consultation instead. While a phone consultation may not be as personable as a face to face meeting, the information and resources the EA professional will be the same. If you have an employee who could use EAP's assistance, but are unable to meet with a clinician in person, please have them call 877-313-4455 to inquire about scheduling a phone consultation with an EA professional.

Frontline Supervisor

Questions



Many employees are taking care of elderly parents while managing their households and parenting their own children. I think some of these workers are at risk for burnout, or at least for being unproductive at some point. How can managers play a role in helping these workers?



My employee fell off the loading dock and was injured while involved in horseplay. A gesture from a coworker indicated he had been smoking pot on lunch break. I have no evidence, but how can I make an EAP referral to evaluate whether a drug use issue exists?



Beyond respect and tolerance, how can I help employees see the value of diversity and use it as a resource to support work goals and the organization's mission?

Answers



Compassion fatigue describes the type of burnout often experienced by caregivers. Additionally, the “Sandwich Generation” describes those adults faced with responsibilities for their children while also ministering to the needs of elderly parent(s). Like nurses who may experience burnout that contributes to less-effective patient care, absenteeism, and employee turnover, these employees may pose similar risks to employers. Realize that caregivers may not notice the level of stress they are truly under until symptoms like health problems appear. For burnout, these could include dozens of maladies and complaints—headaches, lowered resiliency, interpersonal conflicts, cynicism, irritability, low energy, more frequent colds, or blaming the employer for not appreciating his or her contributions. It can be a highly mixed bag of issues. When you witness productivity drop-offs among employees, refer early to the [EAP](#).



There may be occasions when a supervisor would like to refer an employee to the EAP for a personal problem based on a hunch or unverified tip, but this can often backfire. Some employers refer employees to the EAP for help when coming back to work after an injury, or if a conduct problem has repeated itself too often. Note that EAPs always keep in mind the possibility that an alcohol or drug problem exists within the context of any type of initial complaint. The EAP also offers an [Alcohol and Drugs in the Workplace/Reasonable Suspicion](#) training for supervisors and human resources staff to help better understand the impact of alcohol and drugs in the workplace and how to spot signs of impairment, as well as suggested internal process in the event reasonable suspicion occurs.



Your question relates to the business case for diversity. Modeling the behaviors you want employees to follow is the way to accomplish your goal. Demonstrate inclusiveness when formulating teams and delegating assignments to communicate that everyone within the work unit has value. Believe that a diverse group of workers has the potential to find better solutions to problems and to show how diversity can be a tool for increased productivity. Spot ways in which diversity is not yet fully utilized in your work unit and seek ways to make it happen. Don't be a bystander to inappropriate comments associated with diversity. Challenge statements that undermine inclusiveness and respect. Be mindful of your own biases, and avoid statements that generalize characteristics to specific groups of employees.